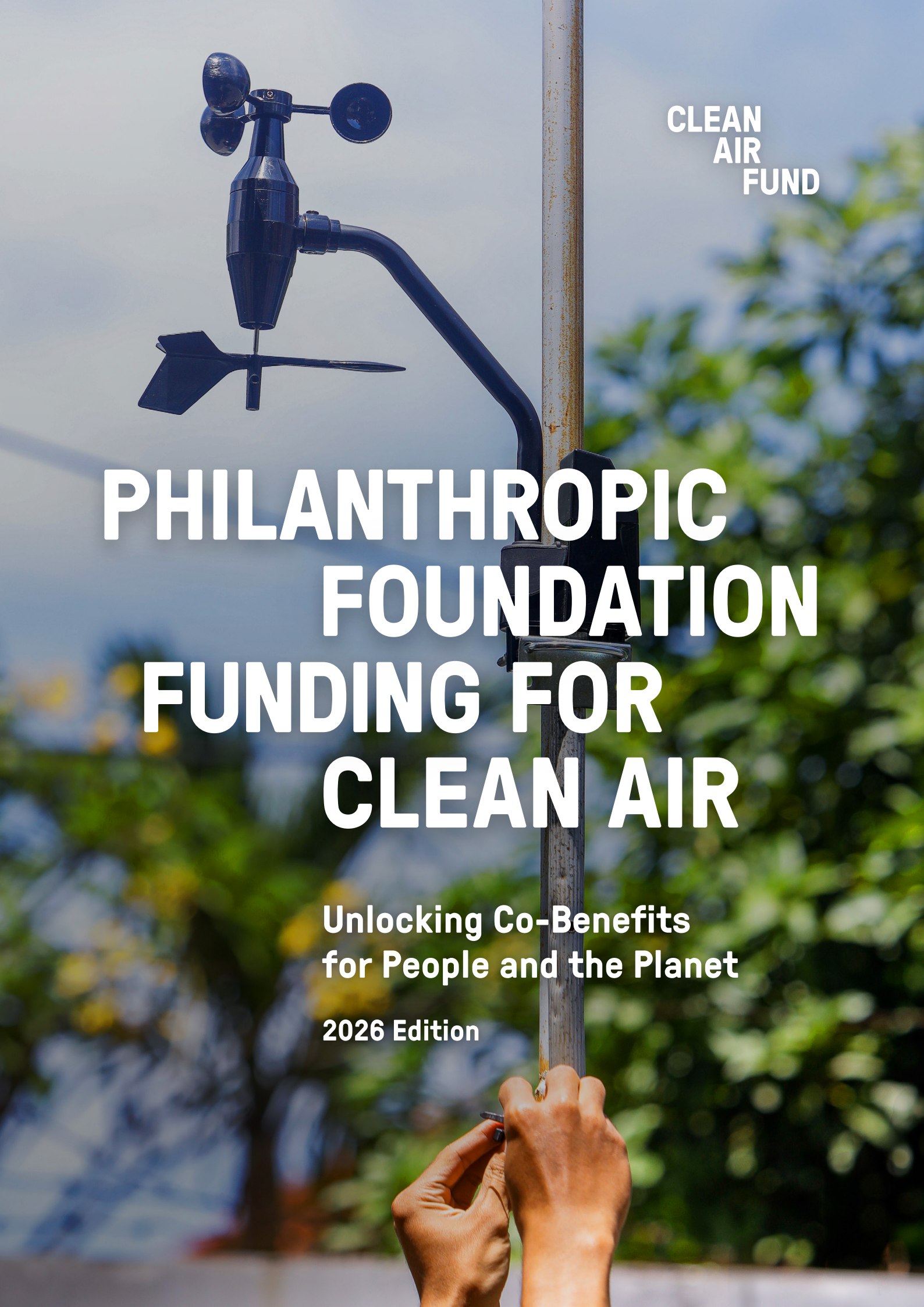

CLEAN AIR FUND

PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR CLEAN AIR

Unlocking Co-Benefits for People and the Planet

2026 Edition

CLEAN AIR FUND

ABOUT THE PARTNERS

The Clean Air Fund is a global philanthropic organisation working with governments, funders, businesses, and campaigners to ensure everyone, everywhere breathes clean air. We fund and partner with organisations across the globe that promote air-quality data, build public demand for clean air, and drive action. We also influence and support decision makers to act on air pollution.

The Advocacy Team is a leading agency helping mission-led organisations to navigate the corridors of power, answer the difficult questions, and deliver impact. We help clients deliver impactful research, policy, and advocacy projects. We specialise in resource mobilisation, policy analysis, and political campaigning.

ClimateWorks Foundation seeks to end the climate crisis by amplifying the power of philanthropy. To that end, it has built a global platform through which philanthropy can support innovations aimed at scaling up and accelerating the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Since 2008, ClimateWorks has granted over $2 billion to more than 850 grantees in over 50 countries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover image: Indonesian Environmental Forum (WALHI) supports communityvolunteers to track pollution levels using air quality monitors in Surabaya, Indonesia. Credit: Dipta Wahyu / Clean Air Fund.

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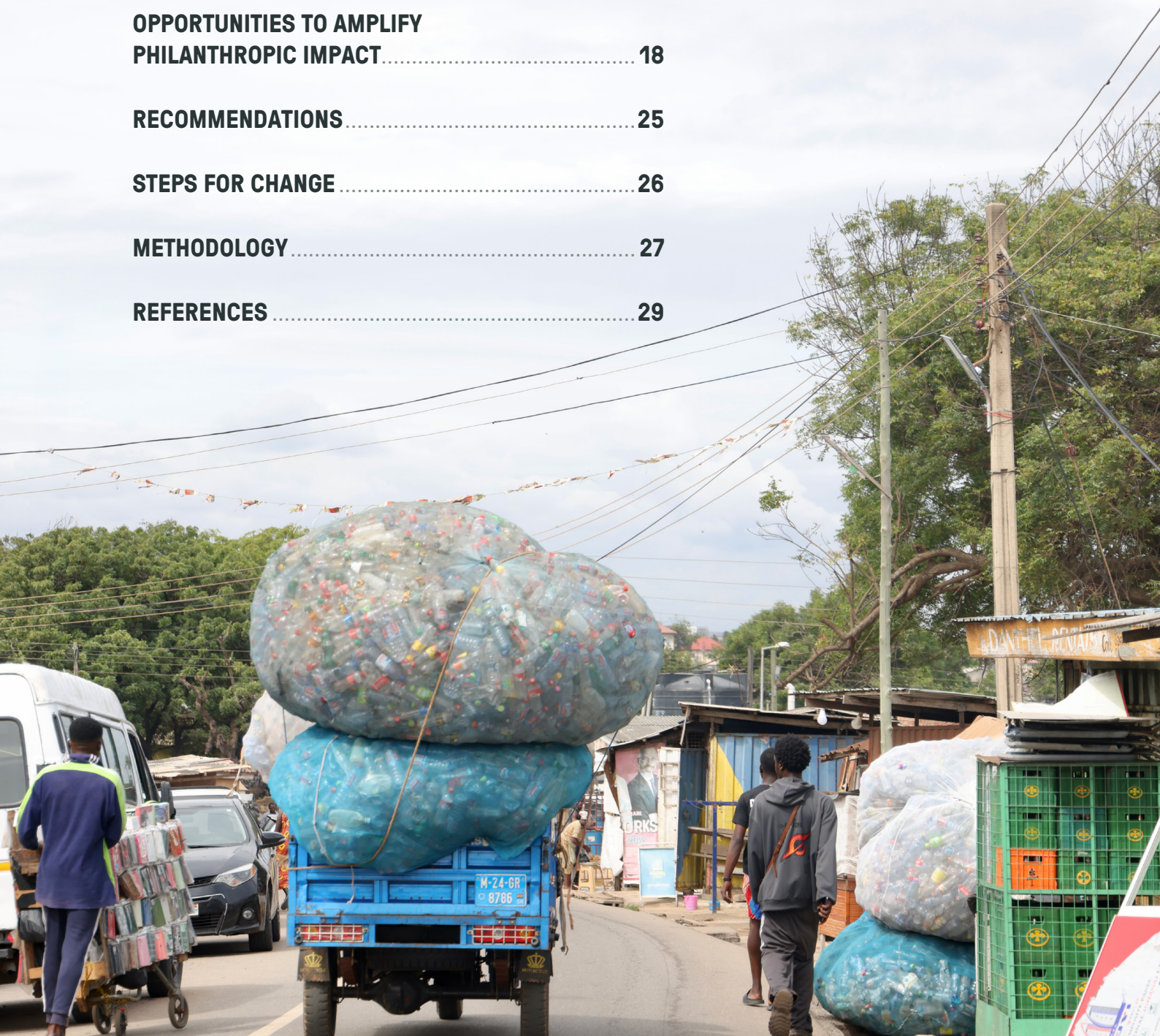
CONTENTS



FOREWORD

Clean air underpins our health, strengthens our economies, and safeguards the future of our children. It is also one of the most powerful opportunities we have today: to prevent harm, accelerate action on the climate crisis, reduce avoidable deaths, and build fairer, more equitable societies.

Sonia Medina,
Children's Investment Fund Foundation,
Chief Ecosystem Development Officer
& Executive Director Climate.

Around the world, political momentum for clean air is growing. Governments and cities are elevating air quality as a shared priority. In 2025, South Africa's presidency of the G20 designated air quality as a priority of the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group, culminating in the Cape Town Declaration and reinforcing global consensus on the need for coordinated action. Cities too, are stepping forward, with mayors around the world advancing bold clean air initiatives.[1]

Yet despite this momentum, a significant gap remains between the recognition of the issue and the funding committed to address it. The most recent data available (from 2023) shows us that philanthropic investment in outdoor air quality has stagnated. This is even more concerning for the future of air quality funding as many governments around the world have recently announced cuts to another source of air quality investment: international development funding. At a time when progress should be accelerating, investment has not kept pace with the scale of the challenge. While philanthropy cannot replace declining aid budgets, it has a vital role to play in targeting high-impact initiatives and reducing disruption.

Air pollution affects nearly everyone - 99% of the global population breathes toxic air.[2] But the burden is not shared equally. Children are among those most affected. Exposure to toxic air damages developing lungs and brains, harms fetal growth and increases the risk of asthma and respiratory illness.[3] In East Asia and the Pacific, recent estimates suggest air pollution is linked to nearly one in four deaths among children under five.[4] These are not abstract numbers, they are lives, futures, and potential being lost every day. Philanthropy has an important role to play as a partner to governments, helping to protect the next generation and support lasting change.

Clean air is also deeply connected to climate progress. Many of the actions that improve the air people breathe - such as clean transportation and the transition of energy systems - also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While philanthropic funding for climate change mitigation has grown by 20% in 2023 compared to 2022, it still represents less than 2% of total global philanthropic giving.[5] This underscores both the progress made and the scale of opportunity that remains.

This report provides a clear picture of how philanthropies are currently supporting air quality, where critical gaps remain, and how additional support can unlock progress.

For foundations not yet engaged in air quality, the findings show that clean air is one of the most compelling investments available: it is a well-evidenced, high-impact area where additional investment can deliver measurable benefits across health, climate, economic development and equity. Evidence consistently shows that investments in improving air quality yield substantial returns for societies and economies - in many cases delivering significant times their original cost in health and productivity benefits. For those already engaged, the opportunity now is to go further - to catalyse additional public and private finance, invest in high-impact actions and sectors, and target regions most in need.

At the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, our mission is to create a world where every child can thrive. Accelerating the transition to low emissions is central to that mission. Cleaner air improves health today, protects children's development, and helps secure a liveable planet for future generations. This report sets out clear examples of where philanthropy can fill gaps - across a wide range of interventions, geographies, and sectors - offering entry points that are relevant to many different types of foundations. We are committed to this work, and we believe philanthropy has both the power and the responsibility to act. We encourage leaders across sectors to seize this moment, invest boldly in clean air, and work together towards a healthier, fairer and more sustainable future for all children.

KEY FINDINGS

- **After several years of growth, philanthropic funding for outdoor air quality appears to be plateauing.** Philanthropic funding increased by only 2%, from $123.1 million in 2022 to $125.8 million in 2023, still less than 0.1% of overall philanthropic funding. Over the same period, international development funding for outdoor air quality dropped by $1 billion (20%), from $4.7 billion in 2022 to $3.7 billion in 2023, meaning overall funding for air quality remains low compared to the level of need.[i] The requirement for philanthropy to play a role is more urgent than ever.
- **Philanthropic funding for outdoor air quality remains highly concentrated.** Between 2019 and 2023, the top 10 funders contributed 52% of all philanthropic funding. As a grant maker, Clean Air Fund alone represented 8% of this funding. This concentration of funders underscores the need to broaden the base of philanthropic funding.
- **Philanthropic foundations with air quality as a core priority increased their contributions significantly,** from $21.6 million in 2022 to $31.5 million (25% of total philanthropic funding to outdoor air quality funding) in 2023. By contrast, air quality funding from foundations that focus on other sectors, such as health and social justice, decreased.
- **Philanthropic foundations that focus on climate, energy, and the environment (CEE) provided the largest portion of funding for outdoor air quality,** accounting for almost 74% of funding in 2023. Foundations focusing on air quality (25%), social justice (23%), and health (22%) provided the second-, third-, and fourth-highest funding levels, respectively.[ii]
- **The geographical distribution of philanthropic funding remains misaligned with need.** North America received the largest share of philanthropic funding for outdoor air quality (35%), while Africa and Latin America received less than 1% and 2% of total funding, respectively. Additionally, organisations based in the Global North and Europe tend to allocate a substantial share of their resources within their own regions. For example, funding from the United States to North America accounted for 57% of total funding ($164 million).
- **A total of $478 million of philanthropic funding was directed towards outdoor air quality projects between 2019 and 2023. The sector receiving the majority of this funding – $135 million – was transport.** Energy was the second-most funded sector, receiving $104 million, followed by agriculture, which received $40 million. Overall, investment in outdoor air quality grew by 106% between 2019 and 2023.
- **The largest share of philanthropic outdoor air quality funding (24%) was allocated to communications and awareness projects between 2019 and 2023.** Data and implementation projects receive a comparatively small share of funding – just 10% and 9%, respectively – despite evidence showing that 36% of countries, representing nearly one billion people, are not currently monitoring air quality.[iii]
- **Only 1% of grants supporting outdoor air quality explicitly referenced black carbon between 2019 and 2023**, while ozone was mentioned in less than 1% of grants. However, there is strong evidence that addressing these Superpollutants would deliver substantial co-benefits for both health and climate.

i International funding includes official development assistance, other official flows, and proprietary data from donors that do not report to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

ii Individual funders can be tagged with multiple focus areas simultaneously, creating overlap where the sum of focus area amounts exceeds the total portfolio funding. Percentages are calculated using the full portfolio funding as the denominator, so each focus area represents the share of total funding going to grants that include this focus area.

iii OpenAQ (2024) Open Air Quality Data: The Global Landscape 2024. OpenAQ. Available at: https://documents.openaq.org/reports/Open+Air+Quality+Data-The+Global+Landscape+2024.pdf

- **Options to address these funding gaps and inequities include** using philanthropic capital to catalyse additional public and private funding; leveraging private sector expertise, technology, and data to monitor projects; directing funding to high-burden, underserved regions; and investing in high-impact actions and sectors.
- **Crucially, the circle of philanthropic funders needs to be expanded.** More foundations should integrate air quality within their existing climate and health portfolios. Funders that already work in this space could coordinate to create a dedicated philanthropy toolkit on air quality, with guidance on strategies, co-benefits, and partnership opportunities.
- **The State of Global Air Quality Funding 2025 analyses show a sharp drop in development funding for outdoor air quality between 2022 and 2023,** and further reductions are expected following cuts to official development assistance by several major donor countries in the coming years. In this context, philanthropic funding – although relatively small in absolute terms – may play an increasingly important role in sustaining and scaling clean air action.

WHAT THIS REPORT COVERS

This analysis examines philanthropic funding for outdoor air quality between 2019 and 2023, based on the latest comprehensive data available. The lag in data availability can be attributed to differences in how philanthropies track and disclose funding, as well as our methodology, which requires direct outreach to funders to supplement data shared by ClimateWorks Foundation. While reporting lags mean the data predates recent shifts in international development funding, it still provides a baseline for understanding the scale and the sectoral and geographical focus of philanthropic contributions to outdoor air quality funding. It also serves as a useful point of comparison with its sister publication, the State of Global Air Quality Funding 2025 report, which analyses other international funding flows to air quality over the same period.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAQD	Ambient Air Quality Directive
ARCH	AiR-Climate-Health platform
CEE	Climate, energy, and environment
COP	Conference of the Parties
COP30	2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference
EF	Energy Foundation China
EU	European Union
GAYO	Green African Youth Organisation
GDP	Gross domestic product
LMICs	Low- and middle-income countries
NGOs	Nongovernmental organisations
O3	Ozone
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PM	Particulate matter
PM2.5	Particulate matter of 2.5 micrometres or less in diameter
PM10	Particulate matter of 10 micrometres or less in diameter
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS AIR POLLUTION?

The World Health Organization defines air pollution as **"the contamination of the indoor or outdoor environment by any chemical, physical or biological agent that modifies the natural characteristics of the atmosphere."** Everyday sources include motor vehicles, forest fires, fossil fuel combustion, and industrial facilities. These produce harmful substances – pollutants – such as particulate matter (PM), ammonia, nitrogen dioxide, and sulphur dioxide, all of which can be hazardous to people.

In 2023, air pollution caused more than 7.9 million premature deaths, making it the second leading risk factor for early death after high blood pressure.[6] The primary culprit is particulate matter of 2.5 micrometres or less in diameter (PM2.5), which contributes to 4.9 million deaths per year, mainly from cancers and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Ninety-nine percent of the world's population is exposed to PM2.5 concentrations that exceed the World Health Organization's (WHO's) acceptable threshold of 5 micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m3). Children are especially affected by air pollution because exposure impacts physical and cognitive development in the womb and during the early years, with lifelong health impacts such as asthma and respiratory illness.[7]

Beyond the toll on human health, air pollution imposes a major economic burden. The World Bank estimates that air pollution causes health damage that is equivalent to $8.1 trillion a year, or 6%, in lost global gross domestic product (GDP).[8] About 1.2 billion working days are lost each year to illnesses related to outdoor air pollution. By 2060, this is projected to rise to 3.7 billion.[9]

Cleaning up our air could yield substantial economic returns: every $1 spent on addressing air pollution analysis generates benefits valued at $30 within the United States, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency.[10] Similarly, the European Commission has stated that investing €1.2 billion (about $1.4 billion)[iv] annually to reduce particulate matter emissions by 25% would generate at least twice that amount in economic benefits.[11]

The devastating effects of air pollution and the benefits of investing in tackling this problem are increasingly recognised at the international level. In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly passed a historical resolution declaring that everyone on the planet has a right to a healthy environment with clean air.[12] Achieving this right requires clear scientific guidance and global health targets, which WHO has provided through its air quality guidelines and roadmap for reducing the health impacts of air pollution (see The World Health Organization's Air Quality Guidelines).[13]

iv Conversion based on a EUR to USD exchange rate of €1=$1.18.

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION'S AIR QUALITY GUIDELINES

The World Health Organization's (WHO's) air quality guidelines aim to address the continued threat of air pollution to public health by recommending evidence-based limit values for specific air pollutants, including ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter with diameters equal to or less than 2.5 micrometres (PM2.5) and 10 micrometres (PM10).[14]

The WHO air quality guidelines are neither standards nor legally binding criteria. They offer guidance to governments based on scientific evidence, country data, and expert evaluations.[15] According to the Energy Policy Institute's Air Quality Life Index, reducing air pollution to the 2021 WHO guideline limits would extend the average person's life by 2.3 years.[16] To date, 128 countries have established air quality standards. In May 2025, governments attending the 78th World Health Assembly endorsed WHO's updated roadmap to tackle air pollution, in which a voluntary yet ambitious global target was set to halve premature deaths from anthropogenic air pollution by 2040.[17,18]

Action on air quality can deliver immediate health benefits. Evidence from the United States shows that implementing clean air measures can improve public health within weeks or months by reducing hospitalisations for asthma, strokes, heart attacks, and premature births.[19]

A 2025 World Bank report, Accelerating Access to Clean Air for a Livable Planet, found that halving the number of people exposed to PM2.5 concentrations above 25 µg/m3 globally by 2040 is both feasible and affordable.[20] Targeted strategies across key sectors – such as low-emissions zones for transport, alternatives to burning waste, or transitioning away from polluting cooking methods in much of Africa – can deliver quick wins.[21] Moreover, clean air projects that reduce emissions from major sources such as transport, energy, agriculture, and waste would also help to advance international climate goals while improving public health. However, lack of financing remains a barrier for these strategies, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), which bear the highest cost of air pollution yet are under pressure to address other urgent domestic development priorities.[22]

Despite the growing need for financial assistance, official development assistance (ODA) – government-provided aid for economic development and welfare – is shrinking. In 2024, total ODA funding decreased by 7% compared to 2023.[23] Based on the latest available data, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also projected an 8% to 17% drop in ODA in 2025 based on cuts announced by four major ODA donors: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In 2025, the United States officially dismantled its Agency for International Development (USAID). This means worrying trends of worsening air pollution, declining development assistance, escalating debt, and vulnerable countries making trade-offs between servicing debt and protecting public health.

Clean Air Fund's 2025 State of Global Air Quality Funding report notes that international development funding[v] to outdoor air quality fell by 20% – from $4.7 billion in 2022 to $3.7 billion – in the year between 2022 and 2023. This decline is expected to intensify due to the aid cuts announced by major ODA-providing countries.

v Official development assistance, other official flows, and proprietary data from donors that do not report to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

AMIDST AID CUTS, PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING ACQUIRES EVEN GREATER IMPORTANCE

While philanthropies cannot fill the gaps left behind by aid cuts, they can ensure vital work is able to continue. In 2025, Bloomberg Philanthropies pledged to cover the United States' financial commitments to the United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change after the United States withdrew funding for UN climate programmes and exited from the Paris Agreement.[24] Similarly, the Skoll Foundation and MacArthur Foundation committed to increased giving in response to aid cuts resulting from the dismantlement of USAID in 2025.[25]

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING?

In this report, we use the term philanthropic foundation funding, or philanthropic funding, to refer to non-profit or charitable organisations that provide grants (including re-grants) across a range of fields, including air quality. These philanthropic foundations are funded by individuals, families, businesses or through public donations, and may be structured, governed and regulated in a variety of ways.

For a detailed description of the methodology, see page 26.

Several factors make philanthropies particularly important players in the fight against air pollution:

- **Unlike governments or private investors, philanthropic foundations[vi] can take greater risks, funding early-stage innovations, pilots, and advocacy campaigns.** Successful models can be scaled with larger institutional support.
- **Philanthropy can provide the leadership needed to drive political change.** By supporting research institutions, technical experts, and local organisations, foundations can help build the evidence base, raise awareness of air pollution risks, and support informed decision making. However, these efforts are most effective when they complement and reinforce government leadership, helping national governments fulfil their responsibility to protect public health.
- **Unlike ODA, which is sometimes provided through loans and can increase debt burdens,** philanthropic funding is typically delivered as grants that do not require repayment.[vii]
- **Crucially, philanthropy has the flexibility to champion equity and justice.** By amplifying the voices of vulnerable communities, foundations can ensure that solutions deliver the greatest benefits to those most at risk.

vi This report interchangeably uses the terms "philanthropic foundation" and "philanthropic funder" to refer to any non-profit or charitable organisation that provides grants (including re-grants) across a range of fields, including air quality. Philanthropic foundations can be funded by individuals, families, businesses, or public donations, and may be structured, governed, and regulated in a variety of ways.

vii Philanthropic funding can also be delivered in the form of impact investment or as repayable interest-free or low-interest loans.

HOW PHILANTHROPIES HAVE ACCELERATED PROGRESS FOR CLEAN AIR

Philanthropies can play a pivotal role in advancing clean air solutions and have a long track record of success in doing so.

In recent decades, philanthropic foundations have successfully:

Catalysed transformative change in multiple sectors. In 2002, the Sierra Club launched its Beyond Coal Campaign, taking the lead in advocating to change the United States' climate pollution and driving the shift from natural gas to renewable resources like wind and solar. Philanthropic investment allowed campaign leaders to test models, develop information feedback loops to measure results and adapt tactics, and then scale as market economics around coal, natural gas, and renewables shifted.[26]

Collaborated at scale to drive solutions and redirect funding toward the most affected communities.[27] Amid growing evidence that climate change is fuelling a global public health crisis and placing at least 3.3 billion people at risk, a group of foundations launched the Climate and Health Funders Coalition at the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30). The coalition is backed by a $300 million investment from 35 major funders, including the Gates Foundation, Wellcome Trust, IKEA Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Philanthropy Asia Alliance, the Nand & Jeet Khemka Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation. It supports research and develops solutions to address the health impacts of climate change, focusing on risks linked to extreme heat, air pollution, and infectious diseases.[28]

Similarly, since 2021, the Global Methane Hub – a philanthropy-funded initiative focused on reducing methane emissions – has helped catalyse over $10 billion in methane-reducing project investments by convening funders and strategically regranting $200 million to 114 grantees globally.[29] Philanthropic funding distributed through the Hub has enabled grantees to expand the evidence base on methane emissions; raise awareness of methane leaks and their health impacts; develop policy tools such as the Country Methane Abatement Tool; strengthen accountability measures such as the Environmental Defense Fund's methane monitoring and mapping tools; and help unlock public, private, and multilateral development bank funding.

TRENDS IN PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING FOR OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY

BETWEEN 2022 AND 2023, PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING TO OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY GREW BY ONLY 2%, FROM $123.1 MILLION TO $125.8 MILLION

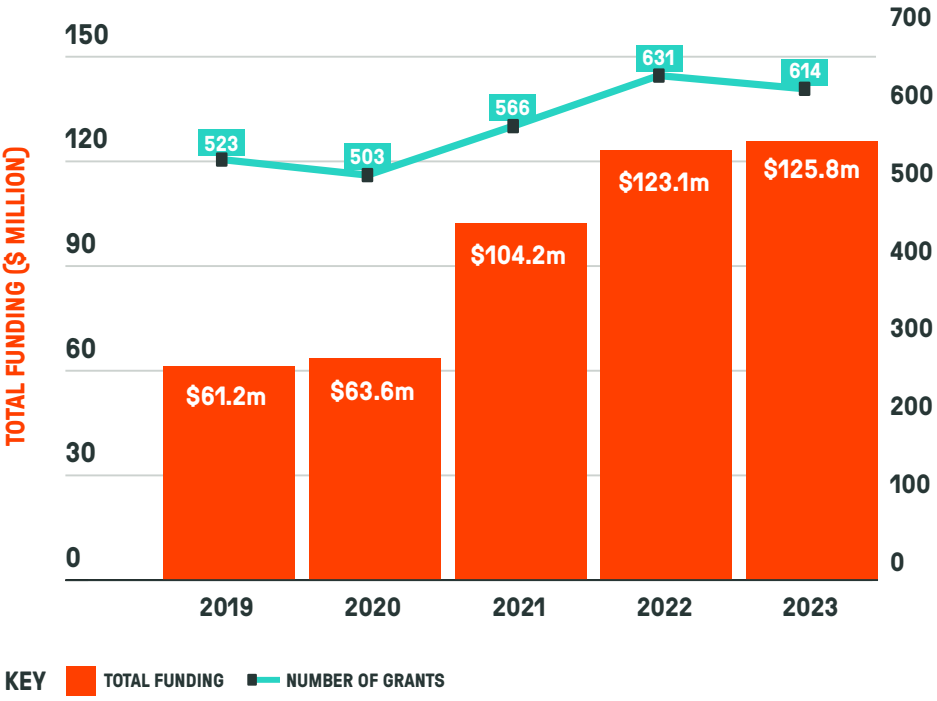
GROWTH IN PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING TO AIR QUALITY IS SLOWING DOWN

Between 2019 and 2023, philanthropic investment in air quality more than doubled, increasing by 106%. In this period, a cumulative $478 million in philanthropic funding was directly disbursed to grantees for improved outdoor air quality (Figure 1).[viii]

However, after several years of growth, philanthropic funding for outdoor air quality is showing signs of stagnation. Between 2022 and 2023, such funding grew by only 2%, from $123.1 million to $125.8 million. With total philanthropic funding estimated at $885 billion, outdoor air quality funding represents well under 0.1% of overall foundation funding.

In the same period, international development funding[ix] fell by 20% – from $4.7 billion in 2022 to $3.7 billion in 2023 – meaning that overall funding remains low. Thus, while philanthropic funding for air quality has remained relatively stable, with a solid funder base reaching an expanding set of grantees, it is still a fraction of what is needed to address the scale of the air pollution crisis. Without greater financial commitment, eliminating toxic air across the globe is out of reach.

FIGURE 1. TOTAL ANNUAL PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING FOR OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY, 2019–2023



viii To capture philanthropic funding flows and avoid double-counting, grants were categorised as either direct or regranted. Where funding flowed from an endowed foundation to a project via a regranter, or where a foundation supported the core or programmatic costs for another foundation, the funding was categorised as regranted (for example, a grant from an endowed foundation to Clean Air Fund). Where funding flowed directly from an endowed foundation or a regranter to a grantee, the funding was categorised as direct. Only direct grants were used in total funding calculations.

ix Official development assistance, other official flows, and proprietary data from donors that do not report to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

A HANDFUL OF FUNDERS DOMINATE OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY FUNDING

Between 2019 and 2023, a relatively small – but stable – pool of 83 funders (which increased modestly in 2023 against 79 funders in 2022) supported outdoor air quality by issuing 1,726 grants to 731 grantees,[x] with an average grant size of $205,000 (Figure 2).

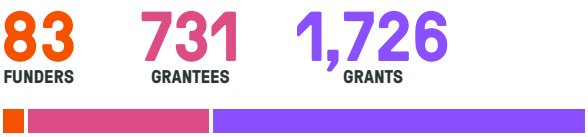
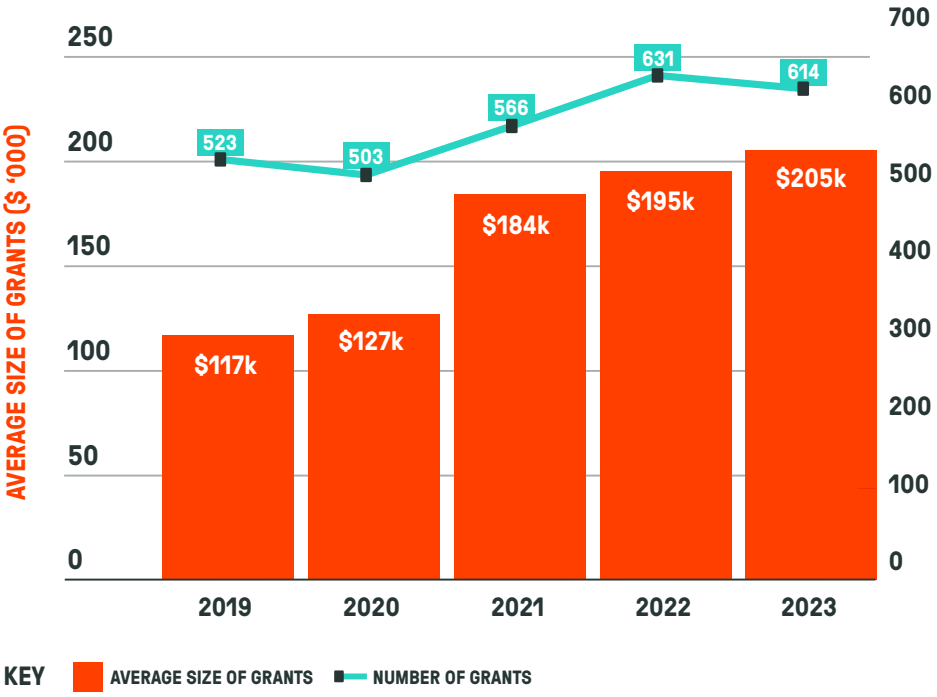


FIGURE 2: THE SCALE OF PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING TO OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY FUNDING BETWEEN 2019 AND 2023

Between 2019 and 2022, funders committed larger grants to more projects. However, this growth plateaued between 2022 and 2023 (Figure 3). The average grant size increased steadily from about $117,000 in 2019 to $195,000 in 2022, but only grew by $10,000 between 2022 and 2023. In parallel, the number of grants climbed from 523 in 2019 to 631 in 2022, before dipping slightly to 614 in 2023, suggesting a modest recent consolidation of portfolios alongside higher average grant sizes.[xi]

Funding levels for outdoor air quality increased over time, but major contributions remain concentrated, with the top 10 funders accounting for 52% of total philanthropic funding. Clean Air Fund alone represented 8% of global outdoor air quality funding during this period, underscoring its role as a catalyst for clean air initiatives and the need to expand the philanthropic base. Engaging larger foundations and new direct funders – including those for whom air quality is not a primary focus – will be essential to scale up impact.

FIGURE 3. NUMBER AND AVERAGE SIZE OF GRANTS FOR OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY, 2019–2023



THE TOP 10 FUNDERS ACCOUNTING FOR 52% OF TOTAL PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING

x Grantees with localised entities are tagged as separate grantees. For example, Energy Foundation and Energy Foundation China are treated as separate grantees.

xi This analysis focused on commitments (total grant budgets) rather than disbursements (individual grant payments). Grants spanning multiple years were allocated proportionally by month across the grant period, with each year receiving a share based on the number of months the grant was active in that year. This approach prevented large multiyear grants awarded in a single year from skewing the annual philanthropic funding data and is consistent with other comparable analyses of foundation-funding data.

FOUNDATIONS FOCUSED ON CLIMATE, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT; AIR QUALITY; AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ARE THE TOP AIR QUALITY FUNDERS

Between 2019 and 2023, philanthropic funding for outdoor air quality was dominated by climate, energy, and environment (CEE)-focused foundations, which increased contributions from the mid-$50 million range in 2019 to more than $100 million in 2022, before declining slightly to $92.5 million in 2023 (Figure 4). Even with this reduction, CEE remained the top focus area for funders, accounting for 73% of funding in 2023, followed by air quality ($31.5 million, or 25%), social justice ($29.8 million, or 23%), and health ($28.4 million, or 22%) (Figure 5).[xii]

Funding from foundations with an explicit air quality focus increased from $21.6 million in 2022 to $31.5 million in 2023, reflecting larger commitments and resources from these foundations to tackle air pollution (Figure 4). However, funding from all other focus areas declined in the same year. Notably, funders focused on social justice more than halved their support for air quality, reducing their total funding from $68.5 million in 2022 to $29.8 million in 2023. Likewise, organisations with a health focus area sharply reduced their funding to air quality between 2022 and 2023, cutting support from $54.5 million in 2022 to $28.4 million.

Reductions in air quality support across all funder focus areas probably reflect a combination of factors, including competing philanthropic priorities as funders respond to multiple global challenges, such as the gaps created by cuts in international development finance. This is especially clear in the health sector, where air quality – despite being a major long-term health risk – may have been deprioritised compared to immediate, acute health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the lingering effects of which may have further shifted philanthropic attention towards epidemic and pandemic preparedness and vaccine development.

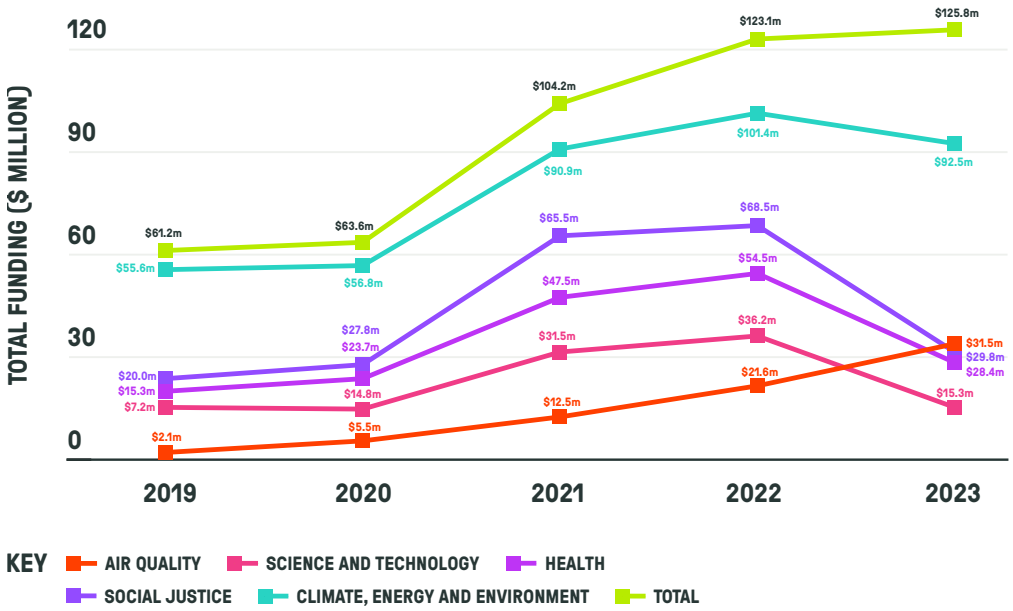
FUNDING FROM FOUNDATIONS WITH AN EXPLICIT AIR QUALITY FOCUS INCREASED FROM $21.6 MILLION IN 2022 TO $31.5 MILLION IN 2023

A BRIEF METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This report analyses philanthropic funders' core priorities (or "focus areas") to identify which types of foundations support air quality projects. Because air quality is inherently cross-cutting, many funders support air pollution initiatives even when it is not their primary priority. Air quality-focused funders are defined as those that identify air quality as a primary priority within their funding portfolio, noting that organisations may have multiple focus areas. This classification was determined through desktop research and information provided directly by the foundations themselves (see Methodology on page 28 for more detail).

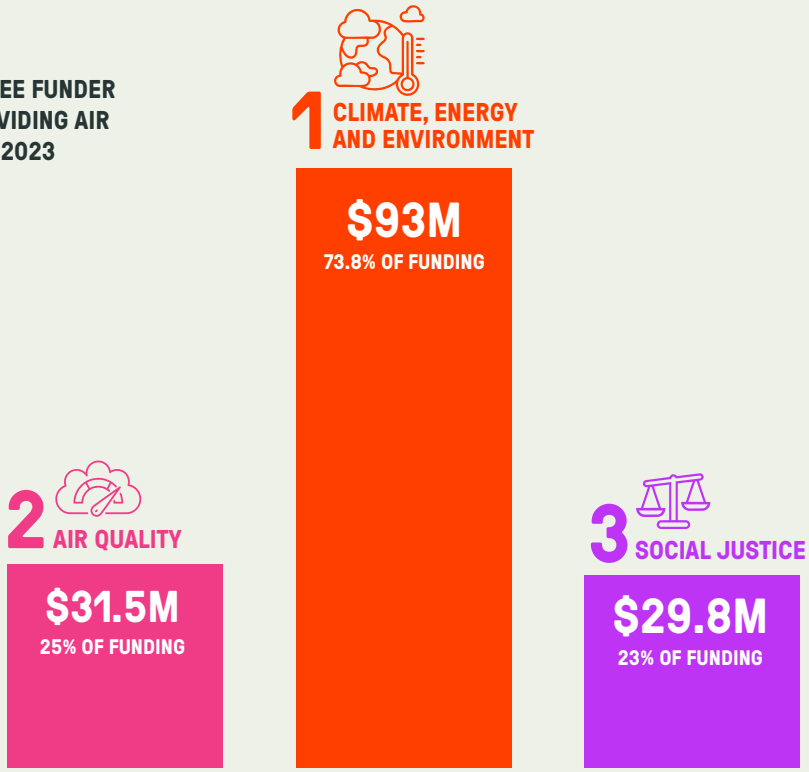
xii CEE is a combined category that stands for climate, energy, and environment. If a funder's stated focus area includes any of climate, energy, or environment, that funder is tagged with a value of "1" under CEE, using a deliberately loose definition to capture a broad set of funders that engage with climate, energy transition, or environmental protection. All of that funder's relevant funding is then counted once under CEE (and not re-allocated to separate climate, energy, or environment buckets), ensuring that the CEE line represents the total annual funding from funders whose primary mission touches any of these three domains. Organisations could be assigned multiple funder focus areas. Where this occurred, their funding was counted across all relevant categories.

FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL AIR QUALITY FUNDING ACROSS TOP FIVE FUNDER FOCUS AREAS, 2019–2023



Health-focused philanthropy has historically prioritised infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDs, malaria, polio, and tuberculosis, as well as maternal and child health. At the same time, air pollution increases the risk and severity of acute respiratory infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and pneumonia, jeopardises maternal and child health, and negatively impacts the prognosis for people undergoing treatment for chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.[30,31] Thus, air quality sits at the intersection of climate and health, and interventions to address air pollution can complement the priorities of health-focused foundations while advancing international climate goals.

FIGURE 5: TOP THREE FUNDER FOCUS AREAS PROVIDING AIR QUALITY FUNDING, 2023



UNDERSERVED GEOGRAPHIES CONTINUE TO BE OVERLOOKED

PHILANTHROPIC OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY FUNDING WAS HEAVILY SKEWED TOWARDS NORTH AMERICA, WHICH RECEIVED ALMOST 35% OF TOTAL OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY FUNDING

Philanthropic funding can help close gaps in air pollution funding and reach regions that are both high-need and historically underserved. However, between 2019 and 2023, philanthropic outdoor air quality funding was heavily skewed towards North America, which received almost 35% of total outdoor air quality funding despite not being the region most affected by air pollution nor most in need of such financial support (Figure 6). India – which, together with China, was analysed separately to highlight broader imbalances within Asia – followed with almost $78 million (16% of total funding), after which came Europe with $57 million (12% of total funding).

Financial flows indicate a strong tendency for organisations headquartered in the Global North to allocate a substantial share of resources within their own regions. Between 2019 and 2023, United Kingdom-based organisations directed most of their total outdoor air funding (about $35 million, or 37%) to Europe, with India receiving the second-largest share (nearly $19 million, or 20%) of their total funding. Similarly, organisations headquartered in the United States allocated $164 million – or 57% of their total outdoor air quality funding – to projects in North America. India- and China-based philanthropic organisations also prioritised domestic projects, committing $6 million and $31 million respectively to in-country projects (see Methodology on page 28 for geographic categorisation).

While most funding in Asia was concentrated in India and China, other countries facing severe air quality crises – like Bangladesh – received little funding. South Asia, which includes the Indo-Gangetic Plain, spanning parts of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, is home to more than 1.8 billion people exposed to some of the highest levels of population-weighted air pollution levels in the world, which heavily impacts their health.[32] Eliminating dangerous air pollution levels in South Asia alone would reduce the global burden of lost healthy years of life by 3% each year.[33] Despite this outsized impact, countries across Asia (excluding China and India) remain underfunded, receiving only 7% of outdoor air quality philanthropic funding between 2019 and 2023.

FIGURE 6. TOTAL OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY FUNDING BY REGION, 2019-2023

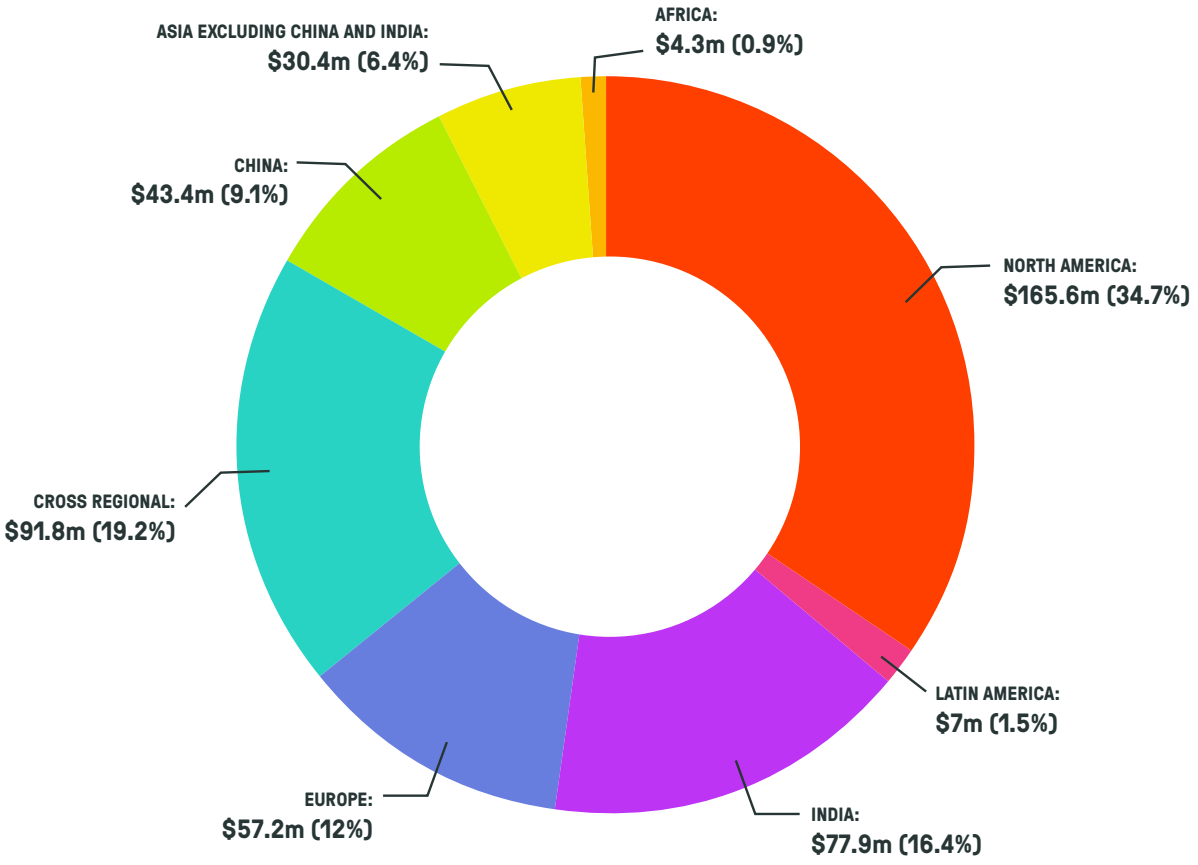
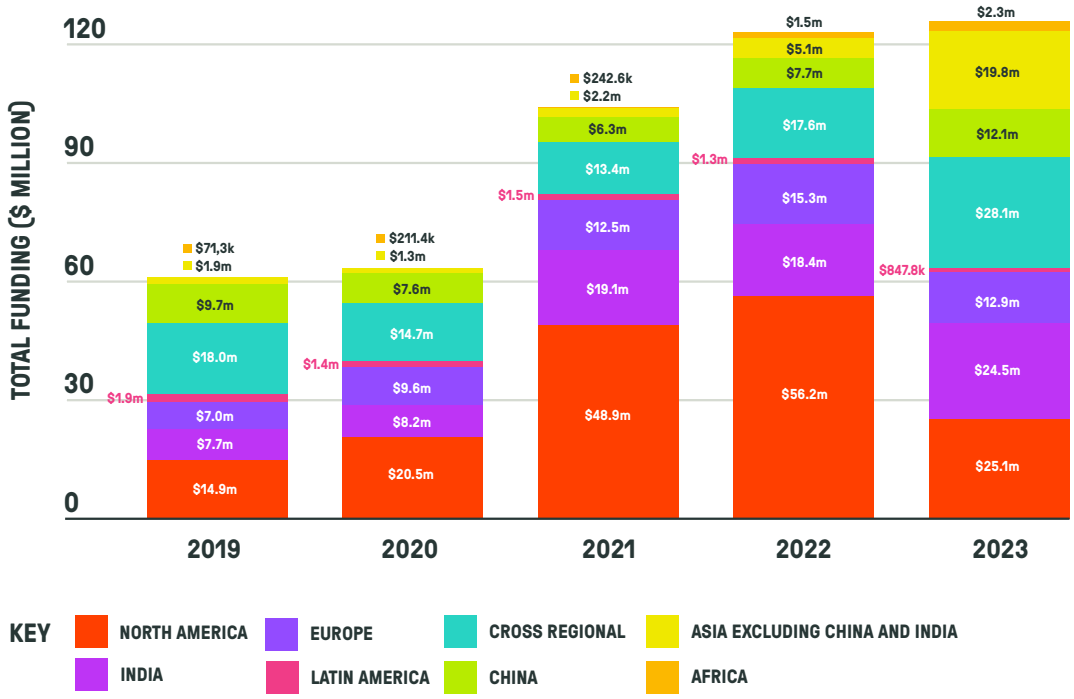


FIGURE 7. ANNUAL OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY FUNDING BY RECIPIENT REGION, 2019–2023



Funding for Africa and Latin America – also two high-need regions – remained particularly low, receiving only 0.9% and 1.5% of total philanthropic outdoor air quality funding between 2019 and 2023, respectively. The remaining 19.2% of funding was classified as cross-regional, supporting international awareness campaigns or multiregional projects (Figure 7).

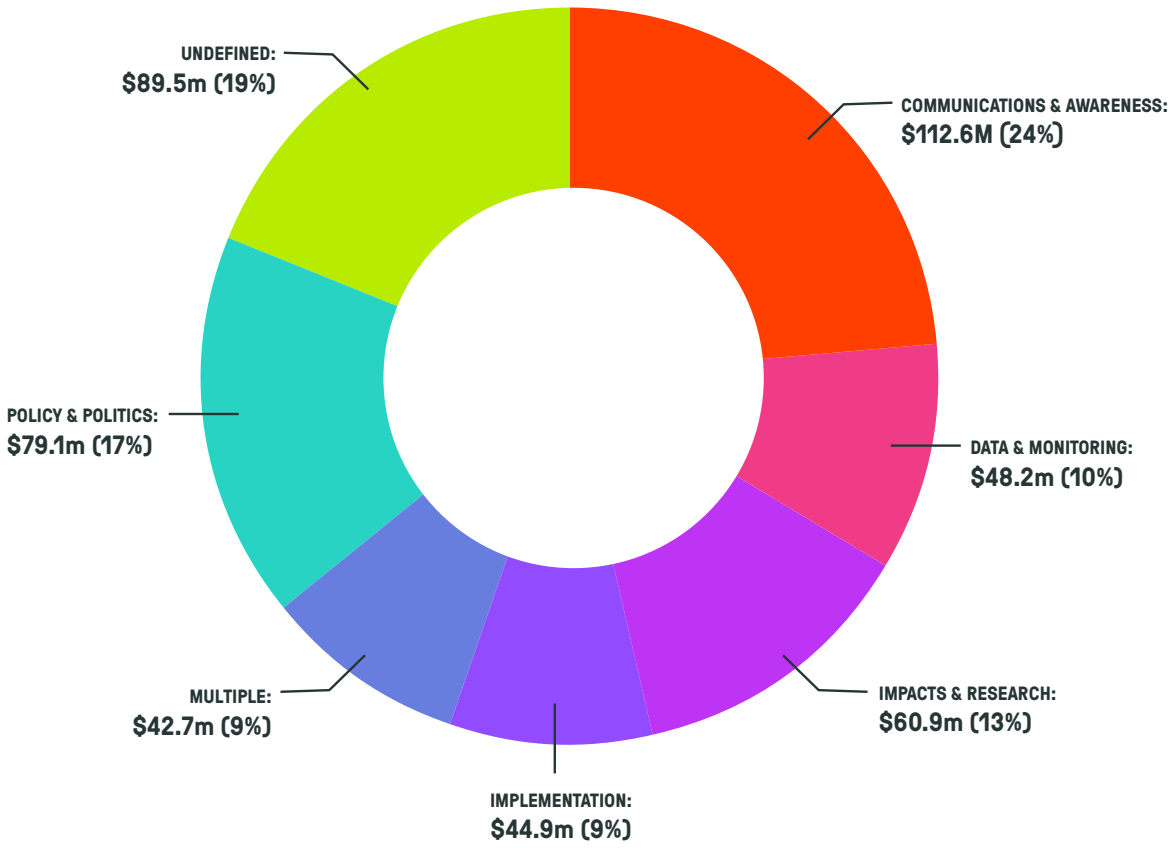
One positive note - within this year's data is a notable positive shift in the distribution of outdoor air quality funding compared to previous years. Support to Asia (excluding China and India) grew from $5.1 million in 2022 to $19.8 million in 2023, while funding to Africa increased from $1.5 million to more than $2.3 million over the same period. Although these increases are promising, they remain far below the scale of need in these regions and are paired with decreased funding to North America – from $56.2 million in 2022 to $25.1 million in 2023.

FUNDING FOR AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA REMAINED PARTICULARLY LOW, RECEIVING ONLY 0.9% AND 1.5% OF TOTAL OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY FUNDING BETWEEN 2019 AND 2023

PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING LEANS TOWARD POLICY AND AWARENESS EFFORTS, BUT TECHNICAL PROJECTS ARE KEY TO SCALING UP SOLUTIONS

Between 2019 and 2023, the largest share of philanthropic outdoor air quality funding (24%) was allocated to communications and awareness projects (Figure 8). Policy and politics projects received 17%, followed by impacts and research (13%), data and monitoring (10%), and implementation (9%). The remaining funding was classified as "undefined" (19%) or for "multiple" projects (9%). These less-funded areas represent critical investment opportunities where relatively small amounts of philanthropic funding could unlock larger flows of finance.

FIGURE 8. TOTAL FUNDING BY PROJECT TYPE, 2019-2023



NOTES:

- **Data and monitoring:** Improving the amount, availability, transparency, accuracy, or accessibility of air quality information and data.
- **Impacts and research:** Increasing understanding of the impact of air pollution on health, the environment, and the economy.
- **Communications and awareness:** Raising awareness of air pollution, including through campaigning, targeted communications, and events.
- **Policy and politics:** Developing, promoting, and transforming public policies on air quality.
- **Implementation:** Investing in the implementation of infrastructure to improve air quality.
- **Undefined:** Supporting core costs of an air quality-focused organisation, or projects that could not be assigned a strategy based on the information provided.
- **Multiple:** Projects with multiple of the above objectives.

OPPORTUNITIES TO AMPLIFY PHILANTHROPIC IMPACT

USE PROVEN INTERMEDIARIES AND REGRANTERS FOR STRATEGIC DISTRIBUTION

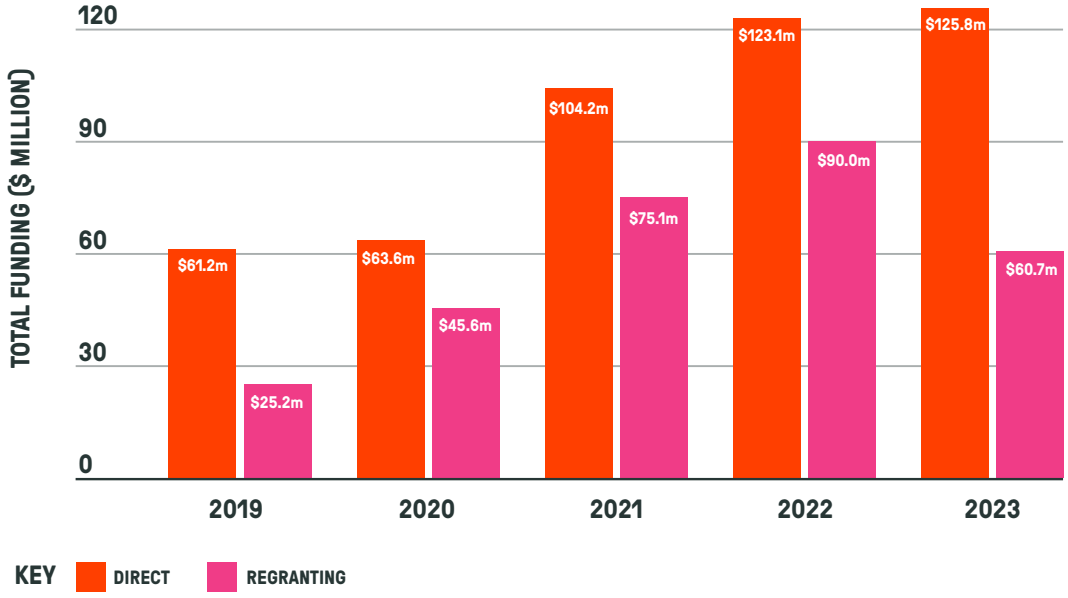
Regranting is a funding model in which donors provide funds to an intermediary organisation (the regranter), which then distributes smaller, targeted grants. Clean Air Fund, for example, acts as a regranter that enables donors to support air quality indirectly.

Regranting offers a practical path for foundations to reach diverse grantees without needing to manage every grant themselves. By working with such intermediaries, funders can expand their reach to grassroots and local projects that might otherwise go unsupported. Regranting reduces reliance on direct funding and opens the door for large philanthropic foundations with multiple priorities to meaningfully support clean air, even if this is not a focus area.

Regranters contribute expertise, regional knowledge, and established networks, allowing funders to identify high-impact opportunities. By channelling resources through specialised intermediaries with strong expertise, funders can engage in air quality work despite potential internal barriers and expand support to grassroots and local projects that might otherwise go unsupported. This approach also enables donors with broad mandates to channel funding more effectively towards specific regions, themes, or priority areas.

While most air quality funding from philanthropic foundations is directly disbursed to recipients, funding provided to regranters increased significantly, from $25.2 million in 2019 to $90 million in 2022, before declining to $60.7 million in 2023, marking the first decrease since 2017 (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: COMPARISON BETWEEN DIRECT AND REGRANTED FUNDING FOR OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY, 2019–2023



FOCUS ON SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Tackling air pollution will not only depend on how much philanthropic foundations are investing. It is also contingent on addressing the policies and practices that worsen air quality – for example, fossil fuel subsidies. If philanthropic foundations want to maximise their impact, they should go beyond funding air quality projects to shape a narrative that supports clean air by, for example, encouraging governments to phase out fossil fuel-prolonging projects. Philanthropic foundations can play a pivotal role by funding sectoral experts, researchers, non-government organisations, and other key players that can engage with governments, bridge gaps through evidence-based recommendations, and educate policy makers and the public on the links between air quality, health, and climate change. By supporting campaigns and advocacy work for legislative changes, philanthropic foundations can also help hold governments accountable to their Paris Agreement commitments.

IN 2023, GOVERNMENTS ALLOCATED $620 BILLION TO FOSSIL FUEL SUBSIDIES, DWARFING THE $125.8 MILLION IN PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING TO OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY

Fossil fuel use is killing an estimated 5 million people per year globally.[34] Yet in 2023, governments allocated $620 billion to fossil fuel subsidies,[35] dwarfing the $125.8 million in philanthropic funding to outdoor air quality projects. This imbalance underscores that philanthropic support, while valuable, cannot drive systemic change on its own and must be accompanied by broader legislative change to drive the reduction and redirection of fossil-fuel subsidies.

CASE STUDY: ENERGY FOUNDATION CHINA

Improving air quality has become a top political priority in China, driven by growing public demand for a better quality of life and improved health. To meet these expectations, the Chinese government pursued an agenda that included expanding renewable energy and electrifying end-use sectors.

A key partner in this transformation has been Energy Foundation China (EF China). Established in 1999, EF China focuses on supporting China's policy efforts to increase energy efficiency and promote renewable energy sources, primarily through grants to organisations in China – and some in the United States – that work in energy conservation and efficiency, renewable energy, and clean transportation.

Between 2013 and 2020, EF China's strategy has focused on three core pillars: setting dual carbon targets; phasing out coal; and advancing clean transportation. These efforts contributed to an estimated reduction of 2.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide. The organisation worked on the development of a science-based air-quality-standards system, which was implemented across local, national, and sectoral levels. Its overarching vision emphasised the interconnectedness of energy, air quality, health, and climate, driving holistic solutions that address these challenges simultaneously.

One of EF China's most significant contributions was its support for the revision of China's Air Pollution Prevention and Control Law. This process began in 2009 and drew from exchanges with the United States Environmental Protection Agency and field visits to understand and leverage international best practices on pollution control. EF China's recommendations for legal amendments focused on establishing health-based air-quality standards, integrating total emission control, developing compliance plans, enforcing penalties, strengthening permitting and monitoring, setting up regional management offices, and adopting multi pollutant control strategies. Their success demonstrates the critical role that philanthropies can play in supporting legal reform through research and policy engagement.

In 2023, EF China partnered with government and university teams to support Linfen Province's efforts to control pollution, reduce carbon, and develop sustainably, providing an integrated approach to improve air quality and guide its transition from fossil fuels. EF China also initiated the AiR-Climate-Health platform (ARCH) to convene experts, support pilot projects, and pioneer personalised Air Quality Health Indexes, influencing the 2035 Beautiful China Initiative, 2050 Air Quality Goals, and the ongoing revision of China's air quality standards.

TACKLING SUPERPOLLUTANTS, THE OTHER HALF OF GLOBAL WARMING

Air pollution and climate change are inextricably linked. Black carbon and tropospheric ozone, known as short-lived climate pollutants or "Superpollutants" due to their short life span and climate-harming effects, have already contributed 0.29ºC to global warming. Despite being present at lower concentrations, atmospheric Superpollutants are responsible for about 45% of global warming, while carbon dioxide is responsible for about 55%.[36] These pollutants are also particularly harmful to health.

Between 2019 and 2023, philanthropic funding grants for outdoor air quality projects that explicitly referenced black carbon or soot amounted to $6 million – representing just 1.2% of total funding.[xiii] Similarly, less than 1% of grants mentioned ozone (O3), with a total of $3 million allocated to O3-related work over the same period. This points to limited explicit attention to these high-impact Superpollutants and the substantial co-benefits that addressing them could deliver for both health and the climate.

Existing evidence suggests that cutting super-pollutant emissions is one of the most effective ways of mitigating climate change and protecting food supplies.[37] The Climate & Clean Air Coalition estimates that by 2030, global black carbon emissions and methane emissions could be reduced by 70% and 40%, respectively. The United Nations Environment Programme and World Meteorological Organisation have identified a set of control measures to help with super-pollutant reductions at a rate that would limit warming over the next decade by 0.6°C.[38]

Targeting Superpollutants offers philanthropy a high-impact opportunity to maximise health and climate co-benefits. To seize this opportunity, philanthropic funders could systematically consider the climate co-benefits of air pollution interventions. Specifically, organisations working at the intersection of climate and health could explicitly integrate actions that target black carbon and PM2.5 into their projects and funding strategies.

PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING GRANTS FOR OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY PROJECTS THAT EXPLICITLY REFERENCES BLACK CARBON OR SOOT AMOUNTED TO $6 MILLION - REPRESENTING JUST 1.2 % OF TOTAL FUNDING

xiii This analysis is based on a keyword search of grant titles and descriptions, with grants mentioning "black carbon" or "ozone" flagged. However, this does not necessarily mean that other projects did not target these areas. They may simply not have been mentioned in the grant information.

ADDRESS AREAS OF GREATEST NEED, INCLUDING OVERLOOKED GEOGRAPHIES AND AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Globally, LMICs bear the heaviest cost: in 2019, 89% of the 4.2 million pollution-related premature deaths occurred in these countries, which typically do not have the infrastructure needed to measure air pollution.[39] As urbanisation, economic activity, and population growth accelerate, more people in LMICs will be exposed to the harms of air pollution.

The State of Global Air Quality Funding 2025 report shows that, between 2019 and 2023, 92% of countries' outdoor air quality funding was delivered through loans, further constraining already indebted countries from investing in clean air that could save lives and, in so doing, spur economic growth.[40]

Within countries, air pollution is also an issue of equity and environmental justice. Marginalised groups (including those living in underserved areas, minority ethnic groups, younger people, homeless populations, and disabled people) are more likely to live or work in polluted neighbourhoods, making them disproportionately vulnerable to the health and economic repercussions of dirty air.[41] In many of these communities, women and children are responsible for household tasks such as cooking and fuel collection, which increases their exposure to harmful pollutants from stoves and open fires. Philanthropic support has, in the past, helped foreground inequities in air pollution exposure and health impacts (see Case Study: Black Child Clean Air).

This analysis shows that certain high-need regions remain underserved, despite the disproportionate health impacts they face from air pollution. These highly burdened regions include Asia, which – when China and India are excluded – received 6% of total outdoor air quality philanthropic funding between 2019 and 2023, and Africa, which received only 0.9% (Figure 6).[xiv,42]

CASE STUDY: BLACK CHILD CLEAN AIR

In response to a noticeable lack of Black-led research projects and research organisations in the field of Black maternal health, Global Black Maternal Health started the United Kingdom-based "Black Child Clean Air" initiative in 2023 with the release of a report funded by Impact on Urban Health. This report sought to understand why, despite reports correlating air quality with adverse pregnancy outcomes, there was a gap in discussions around environmental factors contributing to the Black maternal health crisis, particularly given the close link between air pollution and cardiovascular heart disease – a key contributor to maternal mortality.

The report raised awareness of the equity gap within the ongoing Black maternal health crisis, amplifying the voices of Black women who face disproportionate exposure to illegal levels of air pollution but who are often excluded from conversations around clean air and the health impacts of climate change.[43] The report also serves as an example of how philanthropic funding for research and impact can contribute to action and awareness around air quality, which can influence policy decisions linking air quality, health, and equity.

xiv This analysis consisted of a keyword search to identify whether specific sectors were mentioned in the grant title and description. The methodology differs from project purpose classification, which foundations defined when sharing their funding data using a separate categorisation system.

This funding imbalance is particularly concerning given the scale of air pollution exposure in these regions. Africa and Central and South Asia report the highest population-weighted annual average PM2.5 concentrations. In Central and South Asia, countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan rank among the most affected globally, with pollution largely driven by anthropogenic sources such as transport, industry, and household energy use. Across Africa, high air pollution levels are driven by a combination of anthropogenic and natural sources such as dust and sand. However, air quality monitoring systems across the African continent remain inconsistent and lacking in robust data. As a result, funders risk misidentifying pollution sources, which leads to inefficient interventions that undermine public confidence.

Philanthropic funding has the potential to help close geographic and equity gaps by ensuring that underserved populations receive greater support. For example, in high-burden regions, philanthropic support can help develop community-driven models that address both waste management and air pollution while advancing social equity (see Case Study: Green African Youth Organisation).

CASE STUDY: GREEN AFRICAN YOUTH ORGANISATION

Founded in 2014, the Green African Youth Organisation (GAYO) is a youth-led advocacy group operating in Ghana, Uganda, and Botswana that works directly with local communities to reduce the climate vulnerability of marginalised groups through youth empowerment, skills development, and public education. Working at the intersection of waste management and social justice, GAYO won the Earthshot Prize 2024 in the "Clean Our Air" category for its zero-waste model, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and particulate matter pollution in Ghana by 70% and prevent 4,000 tonnes of organic, plastic, and electronic waste from ending up in landfills by 2030. In doing so, the project curbs methane production, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and water contamination, and stops microplastics from leaking into the environment. Crucially for air quality, waste is diverted from being openly burned.

GAYO's organisational achievements include donating more than 150 air quality monitors to Accra and collaborating with municipal assemblies to establish material recovery facilities and community waste buy-back centres. GAYO has also worked to integrate waste pickers and informal sector waste collectors into Accra's waste management system and drive behavioural change through continued community engagement. Since 2019, the zero-waste model has benefitted over 5,000 people, created local employment opportunities, and diverted 170 tonnes of waste from landfills in 2023, saving an estimated 3.6 tonnes of CO_2 emissions. Much of GAYO's zero-waste work was catalysed by philanthropic funding, especially from Clean Air Fund, the UMI Fund, and the Global Methane Hub. Its success underscores how philanthropic actions can develop critical infrastructure, enable movement-building, and mitigate resource gaps that may otherwise complicate collaboration.

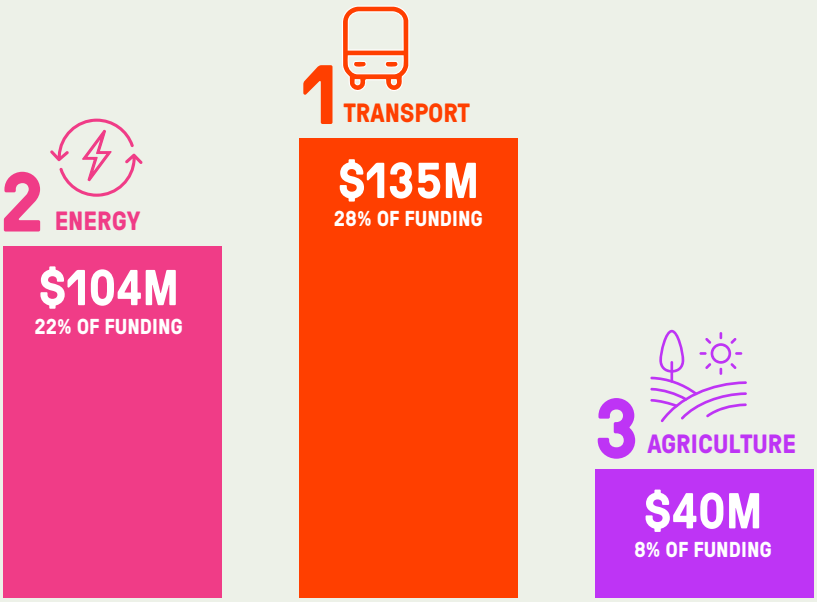
DIVERSIFYING FUNDING ACROSS SECTORS

Between 2019 and 2023, philanthropic funding primarily targeted the transport sector, with $135 million allocated to projects referencing transport or transport-related keywords in their grant title or description. Energy was the second-most-funded sector, receiving $104 million, followed by agriculture with $40 million (Figure 10).[xv]

A similar trend is observed in international public funding: Clean Air Fund's State of Global Air Quality Funding Report 2025 found that 61% of international development funding for outdoor air quality between 2019 and 2023 was directed towards the transport sector. The same report further found that multisectoral programmes received 28% of international development funding, with waste management, energy, and agriculture receiving just 4%, 2%, and 1%, respectively. While transport receives significant attention from philanthropic and international development funders, other major sources of pollution remain comparatively underfunded. Diversifying investments across sectors can help address several sources of emissions that significantly affect both health and climate outcomes, with particular benefits for:

- **Waste management:** Addressing the open burning of solid waste and investing in sustainable waste collection systems can improve health outcomes and reduce methane and black carbon emissions (see Case Study: Green African Youth Organisation).
- **Agriculture:** Initiatives that engage farmers, provide education, and create incentives for sustainable practices can deliver significant pollution reductions by, for example, supporting alternatives to crop residue burning.
- **Energy (residential):** Household air pollution from biomass and coal cooking fuels causes more than 4 million deaths annually, with women and children most affected. Supporting clean cookstove distribution, small-scale renewable energy projects, and community-led transitions can have immediate and lasting benefits for health and climate.

FIGURE 10: TOP THREE SECTORS RECEIVING PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING FOR OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY PROJECTS, 2019–2023



xv This analysis consisted of a keyword search to identify whether specific sectors were mentioned in the grant title and description. The methodology differs from project purpose classification, which the foundations defined when sharing their funding data using a separate categorisation system.

Diversification is also needed in how philanthropic funding is deployed. The largest share of the philanthropic outdoor air quality funding deployed between 2019 and 2023 went to projects focused on communications, awareness, and policy engagement, yet technical areas such as research and implementation are essential for scaling solutions (Figure 8). Philanthropic funders could rather draw on a range of projects that complement each other and work to maximise impact (see Case Study: The European Union's revised Ambient Air Quality Directive).

In practice, building a diversified air quality funding portfolio may require funders to support a mix of sectors and projects in, for example, taking early-stage risks, supporting pilot projects that demonstrate proof of concept, and mobilising communities and local organisations to build momentum for change. This will be critical for improving public health, reducing inequality, and accelerating progress towards cleaner air and a more sustainable future.

CASE STUDY: THE EUROPEAN UNION'S REVISED AMBIENT AIR QUALITY DIRECTIVE

In 2010, air pollution in the European Union (EU) was linked to an estimated 600,000 premature deaths and economic damages amounting to about $1.6 billion – equivalent to 10% of the region's gross domestic product.[44] Recognising the urgent need for stronger regulation, the EU introduced a revised Ambient Air Quality Directive (AAQD), which came into force in December 2024.

The revised directive is far more ambitious than its predecessor, aligning EU air quality standards with the interim World Health Organization (WHO) air quality targets for 2030. It introduces a comprehensive framework that focuses on monitoring air quality; regularly reviewing mechanisms to avoid, prevent or reduce air quality; supporting the exchange of information on air quality; and effective planning to end and prevent exceeding the EU standards. The directive resulted in the allowed annual limit value for fine particulate matter (PM2.5) being halved and updated air quality standards for 12 pollutants. Independent health organisations have strongly advocated for and welcomed the new directive, emphasising its importance as both an environmental law and a critical public health intervention. Indeed, estimations indicate that following the AAQD will cut premature deaths due to air pollution by at minimum 55% and save over 150,000 lives by 2030.[45]

Passing the AAQD required coordinated campaigning at both EU and national levels. To this end, Clean Air Fund supported global advocacy efforts in Poland over the past five years, enabling local nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to successfully raise national ambition and become key allies during EU negotiations. Empowering national-level NGOs remains essential for ensuring the effective transposition and enforcement of the directive across member states.

The revised AAQD demonstrates what is possible with philanthropic support. Philanthropies should see themselves as enablers: empowering the coalitions, campaigns, and communities that will bring the directive to life and help deliver cleaner, healthier futures for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

USE PHILANTHROPIC CAPITAL TO CATALYSE ADDITIONAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING

Development assistance is declining and debt is escalating while air pollution is worsening. This is forcing lower-income countries to make trade-offs between servicing debt and protecting public health.[46] While philanthropic foundations cannot be expected to fill entire finance gaps caused by reduced donor funding, they can provide the catalytic capital needed to unlock public and private financing by, for example, investing in projects that test scalable solutions, develop innovations in technologies and policy, demonstrate and communicate impact through campaigns and advocacy work, and encourage other funders to also invest in air quality reduction measures.

LEVERAGE PRIVATE SECTOR EXPERTISE, TECHNOLOGY, AND DATA

Philanthropic foundations could explore public-private partnerships for data and monitoring projects in which private-sector actors contribute towards technological innovation and real-time analytics. Such partnerships can be a powerful tool to increase efficiency and improve the scalability of interventions. For example, in Nairobi, organisations like AirQo and GEO Health Hub have partnered with Clean Air Fund to harness technological innovation and identify pollution sources in real time.[47] As private capital is mobilised and solutions are proven, these initiatives can attract additional public sector funding and government buy-in.

TARGET FUNDING TO HIGHLY BURDENED, UNDERSERVED REGIONS

To unlock scale, maximise return on investment, and address the inequities in funding allocations, philanthropic foundations could direct more funding to the regions that bear the heaviest health burden, especially where air pollution is primarily driven by human activities and where populations are most affected and vulnerable. In Canada, for example, equity was a driving factor for the Canadian Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities programme, which moves communities away from relying on diesel generators and funds Indigenous-owned clean energy projects that deliver significant community benefits.

INVEST IN HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS AND SECTORS

Foundations are well placed to invest in technical, data, and implementation-focused projects that allow governments to pilot and scale up new technologies and solutions. This includes funding pilot projects that demonstrate the effectiveness of proven interventions (such as the electrification of off-road machinery, the implementation of low-emission zones, and the use of clean household energy solutions) and define a clear pathway for governments to scale and regulate their use. In parallel, foundations could invest in establishing or strengthening air quality monitoring systems to support policy decisions and accountability. These investments would help move solutions from concept to scale and reduce risks for public sector adoption.

EXPAND THE CIRCLE OF FUNDERS

More foundations could consider recognising air quality as a priority, without necessarily needing it to be their main focus, by integrating air quality within their existing climate and health portfolios. Funders that already work in this space could collaborate to create a dedicated philanthropy toolkit on air quality that offers guidance on strategies, co-benefits, and partnership opportunities.

STEPS FOR CHANGE

Different foundations are likely to be at different stages in their experience of funding clean air initiatives. The table below therefore outlines useful steps for new and experienced funders.

NEW AIR QUALITY FUNDERS

1. **Consider regranting as a first step to** reduce risk and capitalise on high-learning entry points for air quality initiatives.
2. **Assess the foundation's existing portfolio to** identify opportunities to integrate air quality within health or climate projects, drawing from organisations already funding air quality to identify gaps and high-impact entry points.
3. **Engage with experienced air quality funders** to learn from established approaches and target areas where philanthropic capital can add the most value.
4. **Start with low-risk investments** such as monitoring, pilot, or evidence-building projects that can demonstrate impact and inform future scaling.
5. **For health-focused funders,** prioritise Superpollutants with high health and climate impacts, such as black carbon and tropospheric ozone. Targeting these Superpollutants can deliver rapid health benefits and near-term climate gains.

EXISTING AIR QUALITY FUNDERS

1. **Rebalance portfolios towards more impact and research,** data, and implementation projects to overcome the lack of accurate local data on pollution sources. Expanding air quality monitoring networks through low-cost sensors or advanced monitoring stations would generate real-time data to improve public awareness of the risks of air quality and inform decision-making.
2. **Use philanthropic capital to catalyse additional public and private funding,** especially for "hard to fund" clean air projects in sectors such as waste management or agriculture. This may include patent venture capital, low-cost submarket debt or equity, loan guarantees, or grants.
3. **Support multilateral development banks (MDBs) with upstream diagnostics to help create bankable projects.** Specific ways philanthropies can support MDBs include data collection and analysis. An example of such support is the Breathe Cities initiative, which provides cities with real-time air quality data to help identify pollution sources and inform policy.
4. **Fund research and policy products** that increase the evidence base of the impacts of air pollution on different communities, particularly minority groups, where research on causal links to health and the economy is underfunded and poorly understood.

METHODOLGY

The following measures were taken to ensure consistency in this report.

This analysis examines philanthropic funding for outdoor air quality between 2019 and 2023, based on the latest comprehensive data available. The lag in data availability can be attributed to differences in how philanthropies track and disclose funding, as well as our methodology (see next point). While reporting lags mean the data predates recent shifts in international development funding, it still provides a baseline for understanding the scale and the sectoral and geographical focus of philanthropic contributions to outdoor air quality funding. It also serves as a useful point of comparison with its sister publication, the State of Global Air Quality Funding 2025 report, which analyses other international funding flows to air quality over the same period.

Data were collected through a combination of direct engagement with leading foundations known to fund air pollution initiatives and data shared by ClimateWorks Foundation's Global Intelligence department from its in-house tracking of philanthropic funding for climate change and related objectives. Where relevant and reliable, information from public sources was also included.

The data differs slightly from the previous report because it analyses different time frames. The earlier report covered 2015–2022, whereas this report focuses on 2019–2023.

Projects were reviewed both manually and with a formula to confirm they met the criteria for outdoor air quality funding as defined in detail in the State of Global Air Quality Funding 2023 methodology.[48] Only projects meeting these criteria were included in the analysis; projects where air quality was only considered a co-benefit were excluded.

The analysis of philanthropic funding focused on commitments (total grant budgets) rather than disbursements (individual grant payments). Grants spanning multiple years were allocated proportionally by month across the grant period, with each year receiving a share based on the number of months the grant was active in that year. This approach prevented large multiyear grants awarded in a single year from skewing the annual philanthropic funding data and is consistent with other comparable analyses of foundation-funding data.

To capture philanthropic funding flows and avoid double-counting, grants were categorised as either direct or regranted. Where funding flowed from an endowed foundation to a project via a regranter, or where a foundation supported the core or programmatic costs for another foundation, the funding was categorised as regranted (for example, a grant from an endowed foundation to Clean Air Fund). Where funding flowed directly from an endowed foundation or a regranter to a grantee, the funding was categorised as direct. Only direct grants were used in total funding calculations.

METHODOLOGY

Funder focus areas were identified through self-reporting by organisations or via desk research. Organisations could be assigned multiple funder focus areas. Where this occurred, their funding was counted across all relevant categories. As a result, the same funder can be attributed to health, CEE, social justice and other categories at once, creating overlap where the sum of focus area amounts exceeds the total portfolio funding. Percentages are calculated using the full portfolio funding as the denominator, so each focus area represents the share of total funding.

The climate, environment, and energy (CEE) category was defined broadly, such that funders with a sole focus on climate were included within the CEE classification.

The report applied a keyword search methodology to project descriptions to identify references to specific sectors, as well as explicit mentions of black carbon and O3.

Geographic categorisation was based on the location where project activities were implemented:

- Europe: Pan-European grants and grants made in the United Kingdom and Turkey
- Asia: Grants made in Asia (excluding India and China)
- North America: Grants made in the United States of America and in Canada
- Latin America and Caribbean: Grants made to southern and central American countries, Caribbean countries, and Mexico
- Cross-regional: Funding channelled across more than one region.

The vast majority of grants were reported in US dollars. Those that were not have been converted using a consistent exchange rate.

All figures are best estimates based on available data and will be updated annually as new data become available. The report does not include government funding (such as from development agencies), corporate donations, or contributions from individuals who donate to or volunteer within the air quality sector.

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